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Viewing cable 05PARIS8072, DNSA ABRAMS' 11/22 MEETINGS WITH SENIOR FRENCH MFA

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05PARIS8072	2005-11-29 10:07	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Paris

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 PARIS 008072

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/26/2015

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SUBJECT: DNSA ABRAMS' 11/22 MEETINGS WITH SENIOR FRENCH MFA
AND PRESIDENCY OFFICIALS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (C) Summary: November 22 discussions between Deputy National Security Advisor (DNSA) Elliott Abrams and senior French officials focused on Syria/Lebanon, Iran, and Israeli-Palestinian issues, with Morocco, Iraq, and BMENA discussed in passing. Presidency officials predicted Syrian non-cooperation with Mehlis, and suggested sanctioning individuals and possibly Syrian institutions, while ruling out economic or civair sanctions. French officials were unenthusiastic about a possible UNSCR on the recent Larsen report, and suggested a PRST instead, citing Syria/Lebanon "fatigue" in the UNSC. GoF officials viewed Hizballah's position as hardening, condemned Hizballah's recent Blue Line attack, and sought U.S. intervention with Israel to seek return the bodies of Hizballah fighters, with the French FM making a parallel approach to FM Shalom. French officials stressed the need to keep avoiding Lebanese President Lahoud, while conceding that his removal appeared unlikely in the near term. On Iran, French MFA Political Director Laboulaye said an EU-3 meeting with Iran was possible in early December, with active Russian participation. Laboulaye stressed that Russia could not just play a mediator and had to choose sides, and described Beijing as more forward-leaning than Moscow on UNSC referral. French officials were largely in listening mode on Israeli-Palestinian issues, and confirmed GoF plans to contribute to the EU monitoring mission, while praising the U.S. role in brokering the Rafah agreement. Presidency officials shared concerns on potential instability in Morocco, citing economic/demographic problems, an ascendant Algeria, and weak leadership by King Mohammed VI. On Iraq, French officials praised the recent Arab League reconciliation meeting, and confirmed that Iraqi FM Zebari would pay a first visit to Paris November 28. Meanwhile, MFA officials explained lack of French ministerial participation in the Bahrain Forum for the Future as due to suburban unrest in France, and repeated familiar concerns on creating new BMENA institutions and labeling the Foundation and Fund for the Future as G-8 initiatives. End summary.

2. (SBU) DNSA for Global Democracy and Deputy Assistant to the President Elliott Abrams met separately November 22 with Presidential Advisor for Middle East/Americas Dominique Boche, MFA Political Director Stanislas de Laboulaye, and had a working lunch with MFA A/S-equivalent for North Africa/Middle East Jean-Francois Thibault and other senior GoF officials. Outgoing MFA A/S-equivalent for IO/UN Affairs Jean-Maurice Ripert, Thibault, and MFA DAS-equivalent for Egypt/Levant Herve Besancenot attended the Laboulaye meeting. The DCM-hosted lunch with Thibault included PM Diplomatic Advisor Christophe Farnaud, MFA S/P-equivalent Pierre Levy, and Middle East/UN advisor to FM Douste-Blazy Christophe Guilhou. Also on November 22, DNSA Abrams had a working breakfast with French opinion leaders and a media backgrounder with leading French and Arab journalists, during which questions focused on U.S. policy on Syria, Egyptian elections and the U.S. approach to the Muslim Brotherhood, the U.S. role in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and U.S. domestic opinion on Iraq.

SYRIA NEXT STEPS IN UN, REGIME STABILITY

3. (C) Elysee Middle East advisor Boche was convinced that Bashar al-Asad would not cooperate with Mehlis. Such cooperation would call into question regime stability, with there being no separation line between the Syrian security services and Bashar's family. At the same time, Boche predicted the Syrian president would exercise maximum effort to give the appearance of cooperation, continue to make unworkable proposals to Mehlis, and seek to mobilize pro-Syrian elements within Lebanon and Arab world solidarity. Boche suggested it was likely that Mehlis would come back to UNSC before his December 15 deadline, and stressed that if the UNSC did nothing in response to SARG non-cooperation, the

UNSC would lose credibility. He suggested UN sanctions targeting individuals named as suspects by UNIIC, and going beyond that to include higher-level officials as well as SARG institutions, such as the Ba'th party, army or security services. Boche ruled out economic sanctions, citing negative impact on the Syrian people, and described civil aviation sanctions as likely to destabilize Lebanon. Boche reported the GoF was undecided whether consensus for a second UNSCR was absolutely necessary. Abrams agreed with Boche that a follow-up UNSCR to 1636 should go beyond the four or five individuals to be named by Mehlis, and said we were now reflecting on what additional targeted sanctions might be imposed on selected individuals or institutions.

14. (C) In the interim period before the expected December 15 issuance of Mehlis' next report, Abrams proposed a narrow UNSCR citing conclusions of the Larsen report on UNSCR 1559 implementation, as a way to express support for Larsen's efforts and maintain pressure on Damascus. Boche suggested GoF disappointment with the Larsen report and noted there was not a lot in it to use against Syria, adding that time had passed since the report's issuance. Boche concluded that any UNSC reaction to the Larsen report should be modest and not complicate the UNSC response to the next Mehlis findings, expressing a preference for a PRST. MFA Political Director Laboulaye, in later discussion, stressed "Syria/Lebanon fatigue" in UNSC, the need not to overextend ourselves, and reiterated the suggestion of a PRST (vice UNSCR) in response to Larsen report. MFA IO A/S-equivalent Ripert noted that Larsen had told French officials in New York October 31 that he did not see need for a UNSCR in response to his report. Abrams agreed to follow up with Larsen, and offered to send the French a draft text of a Larsen UNSCR shortly for further discussion between our delegations in New York. Abrams conceded that if Mehlis reported back to the Council before his deadline, we could run out of time for separate UNSC action on Larsen's report in the interim.

15. (C) French officials agreed with Abrams on the need to press SYG Annan to offer greater support to Mehlis, and counter the negative advice of Brahimi and others. Boche noted Chirac had spoken by phone with Annan on November 19 and stressed the need for Annan to support Mehlis. Boche opined that Annan did not want to be isolated from his "Arab electorate," and suggested that Annan's tour of Arab capitals had made the SYG rethink his view that Arab governments did not support pressuring Syria. Boche noted that Annan made a point of complimenting Mehlis during the Chirac conversation.

16. (C) MFA officials and PM Diplomatic Advisor Farnaud, in a separate working lunch with Abrams, expressed greater caution on Syria next steps, including on a new UNSCR to respond to the next Mehlis report. MFA NEA A/S-equivalent Thibault stressed the difficulty in achieving unanimity on UNSCR 1636, and expressed uncertainty whether such an outcome could be repeated, even in the aftermath of a tougher Mehlis report more directly implicating Syria. Farnaud evoked the possibility that Asad might hand over Asif Shawkat to UNIIC investigators -- a prospect ruled out by Elysee Advisor Boche -- which he said would open the door to a more easily achievable UNSCR pressing for Syrian cooperation without punishing the Syrian people. Farnaud also stressed the need to consider the dynamics within the UNSC as well as regional stability, namely the positions of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, before rushing to action on a resolution to follow up on UNSCR 1636. Abrams reminded Farnaud and others that Saudi King Abdullah had essentially washed his hands of the SARG and that Egyptian President Mubarak was not far behind. Farnaud agreed that Bashar was clearly disliked by the Saudi and Egyptian leadership, but concluded that both governments' desire to maintain stability in the region could keep them from moving "too fast, too far" to avoid excessive pressure on the SARG.

17. (C) Exchanging views on SARG regime stability, both Abrams and his GoF interlocutors agreed that there were no signs of Alawite or Sunni conspiracies against the regime, though no one could rule out a surprise coup, and that fears of widespread Muslim Brotherhood (MB) influence in Syria appeared to be overblown. PM advisor Farnaud concluded that the MB was probably not a threat to the regime and would not attempt to overthrow the government, though it would want a role in a successor government. Asked for clarification on GoF contact policy with the MB, Farnaud (who served previously as French DCM in Cairo) admitted that the GoF was in contact with the MB in Egypt, but said the GoF had no such contacts with the Syrian MB in exile in Europe.

LEBANON: HIZBALLAH, LAHOUD

18. (C) On Lebanon, Boche described Hizballah as becoming more hard-line and susceptible to Syrian and Iranian pressure. He concluded that we should avoid provoking a Hizballah crisis with the GoL. MFA NEA A/S-equivalent Thibault cited GoF condemnation of Hizballah-instigated Blue Line attack, and

said the French embassy in Washington would make a high-level approach to ask Secretary Rice to intervene with Israeli FM Shalom, to urge Israel to return the four bodies of four Hizballah militants killed November 21. Thibault confirmed that FM Douste-Blazy would make similar appeal to FM Shalom.

19. (C) Although Boche conceded that we could accomplish "nothing" with Lahoud in place, he concluded there was little likelihood he would be removed in the near term. Lahoud's removal remained a Lebanese decision, and one on which the Maronite Patriarch must pronounce, though he was not ready to do so. Boche also cited divisions within the Lebanese Christian community on a possible replacement, with the "Qornet Shehwan" faction still humbled by its electoral defeats, and Aoun remaining unacceptable to Lebanon's Shi'a/Sunni majority. In the interim, Boche counseled continued isolation of Lahoud; he noted that French Ambassador Emie did not attend Lahoud's November 22 national day reception, while President Chirac sent "the Lebanese people" a one-line congratulatory letter on the occasion.

IRAN, EU-3, RUSSIA AND CHINA

10. (C) Political Director Laboulaye described recent London meetings between the EU-3, U.S., Russia and China as very constructive. He stressed the EU-3's message to Russia that it couldn't just play mediator and had to choose sides. Laboulaye described China as more forward leaning than Russia on UNSC referral, citing the relative openness of the PRC representative at the London meetings, in contrast to the "Soviet style" Russian representative, Kislyak. Laboulaye described China as more outspoken than the Russians at London, and more understanding of the need to tell Iran that the UNSC is an option to be considered, though the time may not be right now. Laboulaye confirmed that an EU-3 meeting with Iranians was possible in early December (possible venue Switzerland); Russia would have to take more active part in such a meeting and could not be a mere go-between. Laboulaye described two camps in Tehran: those who want to start enrichment tomorrow, and those who want to start it slightly later, giving time to build international, especially NAM, support. The EU-3 would try to deliver the opposite message to Tehran, to show that the international community, especially China and India, were on our side. The main challenge, in Laboulaye's view, was to avoid losing momentum from the September 24 IAEA resolution. Laboulaye commented that India had asked the GoF not to seek an IAEA vote November 24, citing domestic pressure. He added that Pakistani officials, during a visit he made to Pakistan last week, had concluded that Iran will continue to lie about its nuclear program and go ahead with development, just as Pakistan had done. Laboulaye expressed great interest in what President Bush had told PRC leadership on Iran/EU-3 during the his recent visit to Beijing.

11. (C) Presidential Advisor Boche, in more brief remarks on Iran, stressed the need to be realistic and build consensus for UNSC referral, which would not coalesce by November 24. Boche conceded that there was no evidence Iran was willing to resume talks and described Iranian rejection of the Russian proposal, contained in a letter from Iran State Security Advisor Larijani, as profoundly negative. Boche reported that Presidential Diplomatic Advisor Gourdault-Montagne had traveled to Moscow the previous week and found the Russians highly vexed by the Iranian rejection of their proposal. At the same time, Boche stressed that there was an internal debate going on in Iran, and advocated letting the Iranian government fall into isolation so that the more moderate camp of former officials could improve its standing. DNSA Abrams stressed the need to avoid actions that in fact encourage Iran's hard-liners, which was why the U.S. continued to declare Iran as in violation of its commitments and to call for UNSC referral. Abrams emphasized the need to consider how we might influence the ongoing debate in Iran, and at what point UNSC referral might strengthen internal opponents of the hard-line Ahmadinejad government. Boche, meanwhile, stressed the need for unanimity in sending the Iran file to the UNSC. Abrams also emphasized to his GoF interlocutors pending Congressional legislation which could tighten sanctions on Iran and its trading partners, stressing the need to be able to show tangible results from the EU-3 effort, which were not evident.

ISRAEL-PALESTINIAN ISSUES

12. (C) The GoF side commended the Secretary's role in brokering the Rafah agreement, and was largely in listening mode as DNSA Abrams briefed them on the run-up to the agreement and next steps. Boche praised Secretary Rice's engagement and suggested that the parties could not proceed without the U.S. acting as a third party. Abrams concurred that the Secretary had intervened successfully at the right moment, but cautioned against expectations that the Secretary would become the Palestinian "desk officer" or launch shuttle

diplomacy. Abrams emphasized the urgent need for the PA to commence dismantling militias immediately after January elections, emphasizing the Palestinian roadmap commitments and explaining the differences the USG had with Israel on the issue of Hamas election participation. Boche suggested that having Hamas in the PLC would open possibility to change the nature of Hamas, akin to Hizballah's situation in Lebanon. DNSA Abrams cautioned against any outcome which envisioned Hamas remaining a permanent, armed terrorist faction within the Palestinian government, which would jeopardize U.S. financial support for the PA, as well as prospects for achieving a Palestinian state within the next few years. Laboulaye, meanwhile, raised familiar cautions on pressing Abbas too hard on security, citing the weakness of the PA President and the need for Israelis to stop targeted killings. Abrams emphasized Washington fatigue with Palestinian excuses for inaction, and stressed that January elections could bring a reinvigorated PA and new cabinet and PM, which, combined with successful implementation of the Rafah agreement, could result in a new, virtuous cycle. Abrams also cited the imminent arrival of General Dalton to replace General Ward in the Palestinian security assistance mission; the French side expressed interest in meeting Dalton if he stopped in Europe en route to the region. Laboulaye and other MFA officials stressed the GoF's willingness to contribute to the EU monitoring at Rafah, which should be in place by November 25. NEA A/S-equivalent Thibault conceded that the GoF had encountered difficulty in securing participation from the French Interior Ministry, which remained focused on restoring order domestically following widespread suburban unrest.

MOROCCO CONCERNS

13. (C) In response to a query from DNSA Abrams, Boche confirmed that the GoF had serious concerns on Morocco's long-term stability, due more to economic than political reasons. Boche cited Morocco's bad harvest this year, high oil prices, its youth bulge, and lack of job creation as factors stretching the GOM's already overextended budget. Meanwhile, Boche described King Mohammed VI as intelligent, but surrounded by bad advisors and former schoolmates, who were "prevaricators of the first order." Boche also questioned King Mohammed's timidity on the international scene, noting he had lost the international diplomatic credibility built up by his father, such as the Al-Quds committee role, didn't travel to international meetings, and was the only regional head of state to miss the Mediterranean Forum. Meanwhile, Boche described Algeria as increasing its economic means via rising oil prices, which changed the regional equilibrium and put Morocco on defensive on Western Sahara. Asked to what degree President Chirac could intervene with the King, Boche conceded that Chirac retained a "paternal" role with King Mohammed and even intervened in family matters. Boche reported that the GoF was trying to encourage the King to improve relations with Algeria as a precondition of progress on the Western Sahara; the GoF had also sought, unsuccessfully, to encourage Morocco to put forward a new autonomy proposal on Western Sahara which could divide the Polisario refugees from the Algerian government, as the interests of the two did not overlap. Thus far, Boche concluded, the Moroccan government had been too timid and uninventive about the Western Sahara issue, and the GoF was not "reassured."

PRAISE FOR ARAB LEAGUE IRAQ EFFORTS

14. (C) In passing, Laboulaye praised the recent Arab League-sponsored Iraq reconciliation meeting as a "ray of hope, at last" in Iraq. He also commended Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa's visit to Iraq for its symbolic value and positive impact on Iraqi Sunni engagement in the political process -- which Laboulaye quipped was perhaps the first example of the Arab League being useful. Thibault, meanwhile, confirmed Iraqi FM Zebari would visit Paris on November 28, his first visit to France as FM. Thibault noted that Zebari would be Paris after attending the Barcelona Summit, a UK-issued invitation which privately infuriated the GoF. Abrams, meanwhile, described the Arab League initiative as generally positive and indicative of a shift in Arab views. Arab governments were now convinced they should reach out to Iraq and encourage Sunnis to engage, having realized that U.S. failure in Iraq or increased Iranian influence in Iraq were not in their interest.

FORUM FOR THE FUTURE/BMENA

15. (C) DNSA Abrams described the Manama Forum for the Future as resounding success, citing creation of the Foundation and Fund for the Future and the dramatic increase in Arab government participation since Sea Island. Thibault expressed regret that no GoF minister had attended the Forum in the end, and noted that the French education minister had

to cancel his planned participation at the last minute due to ongoing suburban unrest. As a result, the GoF delegation at the Forum consisted of working-level MFA officials, led by the French Ambassador to Bahrain. Thibault reiterated GoF support for BMENA, but raised familiar cautions on creating new institutions or the labeling Foundation and Fund as G-8 initiatives.

16. (U) This message was cleared by DNSA Abrams.

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